

**Government Administration and Elections Committee**

**Monday, March 6, 2023**

**Senate Bill 1157: AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE FREEDOM OF  
INFORMATION ACT CONCERNING EMPLOYEES OF PUBLIC AGENCIES - Support**

Senator Flexer, Representative Blumenthal, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Travis Woodward, I am a resident of Hamden, and an engineer in the Connecticut Department of Transportation. I am also the president of CSEA SEIU Local 2001, a labor union representing over 23,000 state, municipal, board of education, active and retired, public and private sector workers. I offer the following testimony in support of Senate Bill 1157:

I first would like to thank the committee for raising SB 1157. The Supervising Judicial Marshals employed by the Judicial Branch, the employees of the Disability Determination Services Unit within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, and the employees of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services within the Department of Aging and Disability Services are members of CSEA, and this is a bill that is very important to them and our whole union family. They do critical work for the people of Connecticut, and I would never want that work to put them, their family, or their co-workers at risk because someone abused the FOIA process.

These workers, along with the employees in the Attorney General's office, want to be added to the list of people whose residential address is blocked from release through a FOIA request. Currently, there are people in thirteen groups whose residential address is exempted. These groups include police officers, firefighters, employees of the Department of Children and Families, members or employees of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, and other people doing important work on behalf of the residents of Connecticut.

The safety and security concerns that lead to these groups being exempted are the same for the people working as Judicial Marshals, in the DDS Unit, in BRS, and in the Attorney General's office. They are not asking for special treatment or trying to hide from accountability, but like the other people whose addresses are exempted from release, they just want to be safe.

While it is true that personal information can be found in places other than a FOIA release - as we all know, sometimes all it takes is an internet search - that should not be an excuse for the state to help facilitate the release of that information. The open and transparent operation of state agencies is essential to our democracy and at the foundation of the idea of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. However, that does not mean the home addresses of the workers covered by SB 1157 need to be accessible through a FOIA request.

I'd like to now talk about Section 2 of the bill. Right now in statute, if someone requests to inspect or copy the personnel, medical, or similar files of a state employee, the agency receiving the request, as long as it isn't

an illegal invasion of privacy, provides the requested information. And, after they do so, they also inform the state employee, as well as their collective bargaining representative, whose information was requested.

Sec. 2 deals with a request for the files of 50 or more state employees, what the bill refers to as a “mass request.” In this case, the bill calls for all affected state employees, as well as their collective bargaining representative, to be informed about the request before the information is released. This is a reasonable response in the event of an individual or organization, for whatever reason, trying to access the records of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of state employees. These days, as we all know, scammers are everywhere - and they employ a variety of tactics to obtain data about their targets. We’ve learned that mass FOI requests are one method that has been used. Should this bill pass, the requested information will still be released, but impacted state employees will know about it before, not after it happens. And, their union will be able to support them in any way they need.

People should know when someone wants to look at their work-related files. Section 2 does not block the release of this information, but it does provide state employees with some notice. Whatever the reason for the mass request, state employees deserve to know when their files are being inspected.

I would also like to add that the State Employees Bargaining Agent Coalition supports this bill, as well.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and I urge you to support Senate Bill 1157.

Travis Woodward  
President, CSEA SEIU Local 2001